

**MEMOIR OF INCREASE SUMNER,
GOVERNOR OF
MASSACHUSETTS: WITH A
GENEALOGY OF THE SUMNER
FAMILY**

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Memoir of Increase Sumner, Governor of Massachusetts: With A Genealogy of the Sumner Family by William H. Sumner

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WILLIAM H. SUMNER

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GOVERNOR OF
MASSACHUSETTS: WITH A
GENEALOGY OF
THE SUMNER FAMILY**

MEMOIR
OF
INCREASE SUMNER,
GOVERNOR OF MASSACHUSETTS.

BY HIS SON
WILLIAM H. SUMNER.

TOGETHER WITH
A GENEALOGY OF THE SUMNER FAMILY.

PREPARED FOR THE
New England Historical and Genealogical Register.

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1854.



Increase Sumner

MEMOIR.

INCREASE SUMNER, Governor of Massachusetts, was born in Roxbury in the County of Suffolk, now Norfolk, on the 27th of November, 1746. His portrait, the engraving of which precedes this sketch, was taken in the robes worn by the Justices of the S. J. Court until about 1792. In the year 1797, after he was chosen Governor, it was retouched, and the hair dressed and powdered as he then wore it.

The house of his father, in which his birth took place, stood on the site of Hall's new brick block of buildings in Washington street, Roxbury, nearly opposite to Sumner street. This house, in which his mother then resided, being exposed to the shot of the enemy during the siege, the family removed to Dorchester, and had a temporary residence on the farm left him by his father, called "Morgan's," now belonging to the Hon. Marshall P. Wilder, whose house he afterwards built. He gave an outright deed of this estate to his son a few days after he was taken sick, anticipating the fatal termination of his complaint, and declared his intention not to make a will. After the Revolution, he purchased the house and land formerly owned by Judge Auchmuty, which was a confiscated estate, and lived there until his death. This house, situated on Bartlett street, is now occupied by Mr. Charles Bradford. Opposite to it lies the estate of fourteen acres (in the centre of the city of Roxbury) which his father-in-law, Mr. Hyslop, purchased for him, and in cultivating which, after he had ploughed down the breastworks erected in the time of the war, and made it an open field, he took great pleasure. This estate was recovered of his heirs by Joseph Dudley, as tenant in tail, a few years after his death, when Mrs. Sumner removed to Boston.

His ancestor, William Sumner, it is said, came from Burcester

I cannot say ; but this is certain, people's minds have been much agitated, but they can't tell very well at what, as all remains as yet a profound secret.

I shall write Mrs. Cushing, if I can find time, which I somewhat scruple about, as Mr. Quincy is at Portsmouth, and Mr. Walker in Connecticut, and the whole care of the office lies upon me."

Soon afterwards Mr. Sumner made a journey to Pownalboro'. On his return he wrote the following letter to his brother Cushing, which shows that a passage from the Kennebec to Boston was quite as hazardous, and occupied nearly as many days, as a voyage across the Atlantic to Europe does at the present time :

" BOSTON, Oct 4th, 1773.

DEAR SIR, —

After a tedious passage of eight days, I arrived at Boston, where I found all friends well. The morning after I left you, we got out to sea with a fair wind which continued till afternoon, when it got further east and threatened a storm ; to avoid which we put into Cape Porpus, and there remained until Monday morning, when we got out, but made poor progress, there being no wind. The next day we had a strong head wind, which obliged us to put into Piscataqua. The Captain determined to sell his load there, and I had determined to take land tacks and go home in the stage coach. Accordingly we prepared ourselves the next day to go up to town ; but the rain and wind, of which there was an abundance, prevented. The Captain then altered his determination, and put out of the harbor three hours before day on Wednesday morning, the weather then being very uncertain. We had not got far when we found our mistake, and wished ourselves back again. Before we could see Cape Ann, a violent N. E. storm came on, and we were well nigh buried in the waves. The seas were so great as to throw the sloop nearly upon her beam ends, by which means our deck load shifted, and the water, we suppose, run in at the hatchways. We presently found between three and four feet of water in the hold, although the pumps were constantly going. You may well conceive the situation I was in.

Every thing seemed to be against us; the pumps got foul, the topping lift (the support of the boom) gave way, and the wind headed us nearly three points. Soon after we got our boom to the windward, which balanced the deck load on the other side, she righted. We at length weathered the Cape and got into Marblehead much worn with fatigue and hunger.

Thus, sir, I have given you a brief though dry statement of facts, which, as they have been very interesting to me, will not, I trust be very disagreeable to you. In the beginning of the siege, I was somewhat seasick; but fear soon took the place of sickness. I had feelings then which I was a stranger to before: in short, I expected little else than to fall a prey to the merciless waves; but, through the kindness of that Being to whose nod the sea and the storms are subject, I escaped, and have another opportunity of subscribing myself, Dear Sir, (with due sense of favors, and love and compliments to sister, and brother Roland,)

Your obliged friend,

And affectionate brother,

INCREASE SUMNER JR.

Col. Cushing."

The following paragraph in a letter from Thomas Aylwin, a merchant, to his brother-in-law Col. Cushing, dated 21 Oct., 1773, shows what an *awful* consequence was apprehended in Boston from the introduction of tea into the colonies:

"The East India Company has liberty to export teas to America, which makes us uneasy, as it will not only hurt our sales, *but drain the continent of silver.*"

Mr. Sumner, in correspondence with his brother-in-law Cushing, at Pownalboro', mentions the state of public opinion on this subject. His letter, dated Boston, 8th Dec., 1773, says—

"We have been much agitated here for some time about the East India Company's tea, upon the arrival of which a vast assembly of people from this and the neighboring towns met at the Old South. For their proceedings I must refer you to the newspapers, and your brother. The consignees are now at the castle, and are obliged to keep very close. The tea, I believe, will be returned. What will be the consequence is uncertain. 'Tempus coronat opus.'"

In the year 1776, a period of great difficulties and fearful apprehensions, Mr. Sumner was chosen a member of the General Court, and continued to represent his native town the three following years, until, in 1780, he was elected a Senator for the county of Suffolk, which office he filled the two succeeding years, by the almost unanimous choice of his constituents. In the convention of 1777, for agreeing on a form of government, he held a seat ; but the part which any one took in that body is now nearly forgotten, as no report of their proceedings was ever made, and the newspapers of that day mention the fact of a convention only as they did ordinary occurrences in the legislature.

On the 30th of September, 1779, he formed a connection interesting in every man's life, by his marriage to Miss Elizabeth Hyslop, the daughter of William Hyslop, Esq., then of Boston, afterwards of Brookline, a woman of great intelligence, and of a remarkably amiable character. She was afterwards distinguished by her dignified presence, and no one could more acceptably have filled the station of a Governor's Lady than she.

In the same year he was chosen a member of the convention for forming a State constitution, the first plan not having been approved and adopted by the people.

In June, 1782, he was chosen a member of Congress by the Legislature of Massachusetts, in room of Timothy Danielson, who resigned ; but Mr. Sumner never took his seat in that body.

In August of the same year, he was made an associate Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court. This appointment was made but a short time after the State Constitution had gone into operation, and everything was in an unsettled state. After the turbulence of the conflict with the mother country had subsided, the loss of blood and treasure were severely felt. The paper currencies, which had been floated along by hope and credulity, and buoyed up by a spirit of patriotism, sunk in value. All confidence fled, and the war-worn soldier reluctantly yielded to the course of law which took from him his last penny, and left his family mendicants. Heavy taxes were laid to pay the interest of the public debt, which the people could not meet, and for the payment of which their *cattle* were *distraigned*, and they were otherwise re-

duced to extremities. Symptoms of disaffection and acts of turbulence were witnessed in every part of the Commonwealth. The government were not prompt in avenging the insults offered to the majesty of the laws, but used palliatives and acted with indecision, until rebellion was open and direct.

This shew itself in the attempt to stop the County Courts, before the S. J. Courts were interrupted, and it was most commendably met by the Justices of that Court at Springfield, and in every place in which the disaffected assembled. Judge Cobb, of Taunton, who had been a member of Washington's military staff in the army of the Revolution, and who, after the peace, was appointed Maj. General of the Militia, when he found the court-house in Taunton was surrounded by an angry multitude, made his way through the populace, and, as he took his seat on the bench of the Court of Common Pleas, proclaimed his determination "*to sit as a Judge or die as a General.*"

The Judges had a hard and painful task in discharging their duty. They however not only proceeded with discretion and humanity, but also with that fearlessness of consequences which performs its duty, and leaves the event to Heaven. To the firmness and independence of our judiciary, backed by the military power, we are much indebted for the suppression of the, insurrection, and for the good government which followed those civil commotions.

The Judges who held their offices under the charter of William and Mary were removed by an act of the legislature, and five others were appointed. On the death of Jedediah Foster, one of the latter, Mr. Sumner was appointed to fill his place. This distinction was thought by all to be merited. He was then only thirty-six years of age, but the public had confidence in his integrity and ability, and the court considered him an acquisition to the bench.

His preference, in 1782, for a judicial to a political office, both of which were presented to his acceptance, was the turning point in his pursuits in life; whether he should assume the judicial robes or enter the political arena. For the judicial office he proved himself to be eminently qualified, and it cannot be